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## Ellen Margery McCulloch OAM

23 April 1930 - 13 November 2005

Ellen Margery McCulloch (née O'Neill) who died on 13 November 2005, aged 75, was born on 23 April 1930. She was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion in 1990, in recognition of her dedicated and tireless efforts for conservation of the environment, relating particularly to birds – a well-deserved reward.

Ellen's interest in birds commenced during walks to and from school in Kallista. It was an interest she never lost. Many years later, when she attended Jack Hyett's lectures at the Council of Adult Education (CAE), she realised that bird-watching, and all that it involved, was the recreation she most wanted to pursue. From then on she led a life of ceaseless activity. Despite having two small daughters, and home cares, she found time to involve herself more and more in the world of natural history. When she felt she was competent enough she also became a lecturer for the CAE. She also enjoyed cricket, music and spinning.

She joined Bird Observers Club of Australia (BOCA) in 1963 and held secretarial positions in that organisation for more than ten years. However, she really came into her own when she was appointed as the Club's Public Relations Officer. In this capacity she was responsible for setting up displays at shopping centres, nurseries and libraries. She also gave talks

to schools, church groups and garden clubs. No opportunity was missed to further the cause of her beloved birds.

All of this was fitted in with her work as a twice-weekly volunteer in the Ornithology Department of the Museum of Victoria. She stayed there for sixteen years.

As a delegate for BOCA she attended meetings of the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands. She was invited, as a lay person, to the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Experimental Ethics Committee, and chaired the Roadsides Conservation Committee.

During discussions between the Japanese and Australian governments, when they were putting into place a scheme to provide protection for migratory birds, Ellen was a non-governmental delegate, contributing her extensive and practical expertise. During the 1970s she was a BOCA representative at a series of lengthy discussions with the Victorian Fisheries and Wildlife Division. These led, in 1981, to the Land for Wildlife project. To be able to display the Land for Wildlife logo, interested property owners were required to fulfil certain requirements, such as providing habitat for birds and other wildlife. Today, thousands of property owners participate in this scheme, and of all Ellen's achievements this gave her the most pride.

She was responsible for many surveys on such species as Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Pelicans and Bush Stone-curlews, and organised a team to monitor the dwindling Superb Fairy-wren population in the Royal Botanic Gardens.

She produced many leaflets on topical subjects in addition to writing numerous articles for a wide variety of publications. One leaflet, 'Australian Birds and the Law', was translated into nine languages. Her book, *Your Garden Birds* (1987) was followed by *Birds in Your Garden* (2000), an expanded and updated version of the earlier work.

She promoted bird feeders but when the trend veered away from inappropriate (e.g. human) food for birds, she publicised this fact. Instead she advised bird lovers always to provide drinking water – out of reach of cats.

An entry, 'Birds', appears above her name, posthumously, in the magnificent *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* (2005). She would have been proud.

She was honoured with a Life Membership of BOCA in 1985, the Australian Natural History Medallion in 1990, and in 1991 with a Medal of the Order of Australia, for 'services to ornithology'.



Ellen McCulloch OAM. Photo Gael Trusler

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**One Hundred Years Ago**

A tramp from Healesville to Buxton.

Botanical and Ornithological Notes for September.

By A.D. Hardy, F.L.S. and Mrs. Hardy.

...Leaving Narbethong and Fisher's Creek behind, we climbed the spur beyond. The third animal, other than birds, we saw here – a Wombat, *Phascolonyx mitchelli*, Owen, standing with its legs deep in snow, and with the ends of a grass-like plant projecting from its mouth, being a very conspicuous object. It was far from any cover, and stood motionless, and apparently numbed with cold, until we stood within six feet of it. Our voices, however, caused it to beat a precipitous retreat down the steep hillside, a shower of snow following as the weighed down bracken fronds were released and the stems acted like springs. Everywhere the stems of buried bracken fronds appeared like countless croquet hoops. We followed back the Wombat's tracks to ascertain what plant the animal had been eating, and found it to be *Xerotes longifolia*, of which the leaves had been pulled up, and the sweet, white, succulent parts near the root eaten. Here and there we found this *Xerotes* with the comparatively hard green leaves cropped off to the surface of the ground, the root parts being neglected.

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